"The Roumis,"[9] they also say, "are superior to us in many ways, but they are always afraid of death."

Touggourt, 9 April

Arabs camped on the squares; fires being lighted; columns of smoke almost invisible in the evening light. We were at the top of the mosque when the muezzin carne up to chant the call to prayer.

The sun set as if for ever on the vast exhausted plain. The sand, all day lighter, has become darker than the sky.

We had suffered all day from the sun, and the freshness of evening was a delight to us. Children were playing on the square and dogs were barking on the terraces of houses. Above us the voice of the muezzin filled the little cupola on the top of the minaret. His voice, prolonged on a single note, seemed the reverberation of a great bell; then it stopped, so suddenly that it left a void in the air.

The caravans were setting out, slowly, and our soul was filled with excitement and anguish not to know the end of their interminable wandering.

Because of the extraordinary drought all the livestock died this year, and meat has become so scarce that people are reduced to eating camel.

On the way out of town you can see, under a little roof of dried palms, one of those enormous animals cut in pieces, a mass of purple flesh, which is covered with flies as soon as no one drives them off. The flies in these districts are as numerous as the posterity of Abraham. They lay their eggs on abandoned carcasses of sheep, horses, or camels rotting in the sun; their larvae feed freely there, then after their transformation fly to the towns in swarms. You swallow them, you breathe them, you are tickled, driven crazy, beclouded with them; the walls vibrate with them, the butchers' and grocers* stands are crawling with them. At

Touggourt the merchants have little palm whisks and try to drive them over to the neighbors. At Kairouan there are so many that the best thing is to pay no attention to them. The merchants drive them away only when a customer asks to see the merchandise. Our carriage, when we arrived, was enveloped in a cloud. At the hotel the plates and glasses were protected by metal covers that are taken off, or raised rather, only to eat or drink.

M'Reyer, 11 April

Amazing salt lakes bordered with mirages. From the top of a sandy hill, after the immense expanse o£ the desert, one thinks: "Look! the sea!" A vast blue sea dotted with small boats and islands, a sea that you fancy to be deep and that refreshes your soul. You approach, you touch

[9] Arab name for Christians.